

109 AIRLIFT SQUADRON



MISSION

LINEAGE

109 Aero Squadron organized, 27 Aug 1917

Redesignated 803d Aero Squadron, 1 Feb 1918

Demobilized, 23 Jun 1919

109 Squadron activated 17 Jan 1921

Redesignated 109 Observation Squadron, 25 Jan 1923

109 Aero Squadron and 803rd Aero Squadron consolidated, 1936. Consolidated organization designated 109 Aero Squadron.

Redesignated 109 Observation Squadron (Medium), 13 Jan 1942

Redesignated 109 Observation Squadron, 4 Jul 1942

Redesignated 109 Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter), 31 May 1943

Redesignated 109 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, 13 Nov 1943

Inactivated, 9 Nov 1945

Redesignated 109 Fighter Squadron (Single-Engine) and allotted to MN NG, 24 May 1946

Extended Federal recognition, 14 Sep 1946

Redesignated 109 Fighter Interceptor Squadron

Redesignated 109 Air Transport Squadron (Heavy), 22 Mar 1960

Redesignated 109 Military Airlift Squadron, 1 Jan 1966

Redesignated 109 Tactical Airlift Squadron, 20 Mar 1971

Redesignated 109 Airlift Squadron, 15 Mar 1992

STATIONS

Kelly Field, TX, 27 Aug 1917

Garden City, NY, 1 Nov-7 Dec 1917

St Maixent, France, 2 Jan 1918

Romorantin, France, 18 Jan 1918-Jun 1919

Mitchel Field, NY, 13-23 Jun 1919

St Paul, MN, 17 Jan 1921

Wold-Chamberlain Field, MN

Holman Municipal Airport, St Paul, MN, 1930

Camp Beauregard, LA, 27 Feb 1941

Savannah, GA, 18 Dec 1941

Esler Field, LA, 29 Jan-12 Aug 1942

Membury, England, 7 Sep 1942

Atcham, England, 21 Nov 1942

Membury, England, 15 May 1943

Middle Wallop, England, 12 Dec 1943

Le Molay, France, 4 Jul 1944

Toussus le Noble, France, 29 Aug 1944

Buc, France, 31 Aug 1944

Gosselies, Belgium, 20 Sep 1944 (operated from Chievres, Belgium, 7-18 Dec 1944)

Vogelsang, Germany, 24 Mar 1945

Limburg, Germany, 2 Apr 1945

Eschwege, Germany, 12 Apr-c. 6 Jul 1945

Drew Field, FL, 16 Sep-9 Nov 1945

Mitchell Field, NY

Holman Municipal Airport, St Paul, MN

Drew Field, FL

Holman Municipal Airport, St Paul, MN

Minneapolis St Paul, MN

ASSIGNMENTS

Unkn, 27 Aug 1917-Jan 1918

Air Service Production Center No. 2, Jan 1918-Jun 1919

Minnesota NG (divisional aviation, 34th Division), 17 Jan 1921

V Army Corps, 10 Feb 1941

67th Observation (later Reconnaissance; Tactical Reconnaissance Reconnaissance) Group, 1 Sep 1941-9 Nov 1945

WEAPON SYSTEMS

Mission Aircraft

Curtiss Oriole

JN6H

O-1, 1926

PT-1

TW-3

BT-1

O-2C, 1927

O-2H

O-17

O-38, 1938

O-46

O-47, 1938

O-38E, 1940

BC-1

BC-1A

O-47A/B

O-49

A-20,

Spitfire, 1942

L-4

P-51

F-6

F-51D, 1948

F-51H

T-28A

F-94A, 1957

F-94B

F-94C

F-89H, 1959

C-97A, 1960

C-97G

C-130A, 1970

C-130E, 1981

Support Aircraft

T-33

C-47A

COMMANDERS

Maj Ray S. Miller, 17 Jan 1921

Cpt Gilman C. Holien

Cpt Arden Cowgill

1LT Albert R. DeFehr, 11 Jun 1941

Maj Connor

Maj Thompson

Maj Robison

LTC Robert J. Tschida

HONORS

Service Streamers

Theater of Operations

Campaign Streamers

Antisubmarine, American Theater

Air Offensive, Europe

Normandy

Northern France

Rhineland

Ardennes-Alsace

Central Europe

Air Combat, EAME Theater

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

Distinguished Unit Citation

LeHavre and Straits of Dover, [23] Feb-[7] Mar 1944

Cited in the Order of the Day, Belgian Army

6 Jun-30 Sep 1944

16 Dec 1944-25 Jan 1945

Belgian Fourragere

EMBLEM



109 Observation Squadron emblem



109 Fighter Interceptor Squadron



109 Airlift Squadron emblem

On a blue arrowhead point up the symbol of the aurora borealis in gold. **SIGNIFICANCE**
The unit's new insignia for the marking of its aircraft was approved in 1939. The blue arrowhead represented the Arrowhead Section of Northern Minnesota. The golden rays of the aurora borealis appeared across the bottom of the "point up" arrowhead. They numbered 34 to signify assignment to the 34th Division. (Approved, 7 Mar 1939; superseded, 17 Jul 1959; reinstated, 15 Dec 1965)

From an idea submitted by Lt. Bob Weber to Major Thorson. Major Sorenson and MSgt. Cook contributed to the design by adding a Nordic theme. The gopher was given a shield, helmet and battle axe. With the artistic talents of Phil Barrage of the Art Department of Jostens.

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

On the plains of Texas of Kelly Field, South San Antonio, the 803rd Aero Repair Squadron was officially organized on August 28, 1917, as the 109 Aero Squadron. The original personnel of the organization were composed of men of various vocations, representing practically every section of the United States. It was a husky outfit of volunteers recruited largely through the great army rendezvous at Fort Thomas, Ky., and Columbus Barracks, Ohio. At the time of organization 1st LT B. L. Carson was assigned to temporary command of the squadron and served in that capacity until September 24, 1917, when 1st LT John A. Herlihy, was placed in command. On September 5, 1917, the designation of the organization was changed from the 109 Aero Squadron to the 109 Aero Repair Squadron.

In Texas the time was spent in organizing and perfecting the command; with drills, hikes, guard duty, fatigue work and the hundred and one other things that are done in military training camps. The early days on Kelly Field will always bring pleasant memories for it was in that land of sand-swept spaces burning suns and radiant nights, rattle snakes, cactus and sand storms that the squadron had its birth. There were long marches under blistering skies hard drills on dusty parade grounds weary hours of fatigue and guard duty but in this way the rudiments of soldiering were taught, and there were always pleasant recreations after duties were performed.

The squadron left Kelly Field for the great concentration camps at Mineola, Long Island, NY., at 5:05 P.M. on Friday, October 24, 1917. A few hours prior to departure it became necessary to leave behind 37 original members of the squadron and to fill their places by transfer from other organizations. These changes were made in record time, and the squadron, traveling in Pullman tourist cars, was soon moving north on the first lap of its overseas journey.

The trip was completed without accident, and at 7:00 A.M November 1, 1917. The squadron detrained near Mineola and was assigned to barracks in the aviation concentration camp at

Garden City, Long Island, N.Y. Here the work of equipping and drilling the organization for overseas service was performed, and details from the squadron assisted in construction work about the camp. Furloughs were allowed to many of the men, and practically all of them were granted 24-hour passes. On Thanksgiving Day, 1917, a majority of the squadron by special invitations took dinner with families of New York and vicinity, and a special dinner was served in camp.

The barracks occupied by the squadron at Garden City were entirely modern, but not quite finished at the time. When the weather grew colder the plumbing was not completed, and it is still a joke with the men that the heat was turned on in their quarters just about the time the squadron was ordered to move.

At Garden City the designation of the organization was changed from the 109 Aero Repair Squadron to the 109 Aero Service Squadron. About this time the following officers, who came overseas with the squadron, were assigned to the organization: 1st LT O. S. Ferson, (now Captain); 1st LT G. S. Darby, (now Captain, Medical Corps); 1st LT S. J. A. Wifvat; 1st LT A. G. Gibbs; 1st LT L. H. Ott, flyer; and 1st LT Herbert McVey, flyer.

The squadron left Garden City at midnight on December 7, 1917. Traveling in poorly heated day coaches some entirely without heat the trip was made through the New England States and the Dominion of Canada during extreme cold weather accompanied by a series of snow storms. Trains were greatly delayed on account of weather conditions, and the trip was a hard one. At several stations Red Cross workers cheered the soldiers with refreshments; as was done when the squadron moved from the South to Garden City.

Arriving at St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, at 7:00 A. M. December 10, 1917, the squadron at once embarked on the S.S."Tunisian," an English vessel, of the Canadian-Pacific Allen Line, manned by a British crew. Over heavy seas with a snow storm raging the "Tunisian" left port during the night of the same date, arriving in the harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, on the following morning. In this harbor on every side could be seen the terrible wreckage resulting from the catastrophe which had occurred a few days earlier.

Accompanied by seven other transport vessels, loaded with American troops and war material, the "Tunisian" put to sea on the afternoon of December 13, 1917. The ships were camouflaged with great stripes painted in variegated colors, and a constant watch for submarines was kept on the voyage across the Atlantic. No lights were allowed on deck at night and life preservers were worn at all times. Boat drill and physical exercises were conducted daily, and for amusement the troops read, sang, or tried their skill at "craps" and other games.

The squadron did its turn at guard duty and fatigue work. The weather was bitterly cold, and the sea was rough and stormy for almost the entire time of the voyage. The convoy steered in a zigzag course to avoid submarine attack. In what was considered the most perilous part of the submarine danger zone a flock of American destroyers appeared and lurked near the transports until they were safely in port.

On Christmas morning 1917, the "Tunisian" stood at anchor at the docks of Liverpool, England. It was a happy squadron that heard bells chiming from the spires of Liverpool that morning and saw "Merry England" across gray fog clouds that hung low over the harbor. Christmas Day was spent on the boat. At dawn on the following morning the squadron disembarked and entrained for Southampton. Arriving at that city shortly after mid-night on December 27, 1917, the squadron hiked to a large British rest camp near the city where the men were quartered in tents. On the dark and stormy night of December 29, 1917, the trip was made across the English Channel in an old "side wheeler" to Le Havre, France. Besides the Americans there were many British soldiers aboard returning from "Blighty" The waters of the channel were rougher than any storms encountered in the voyage across the Atlantic. Just out of the harbor at Southampton the wreck of a large British vessel, said to have been destroyed by an enemy submarine, was passed; but no enemy craft was encountered en route to Le Havre.

The squadron touched French terrain on December 30, 1917, and was again quartered in a British rest camp. From 20 to 25 men were put in each of the small tents assigned to the squadron, and no fires were allowed although the weather was extremely cold. The men ate at the British mess, and there had occasion to learn that the Englishman's proverbial weakness for tea is a reality.

The squadron left Le Havre on the afternoon of January 1, 1918. The troops entrained in little French box cars---about 40 men to the car. On the outside of each of the "wagons" appeared the legend: "40 hommes -- 8 Cheveaux" ---40 men--8 horses. This phrase appealed to the sense of humor despite the hardships of travel in jolting, heatless cars in the dead of winter with a ration of "Corned Willie and "Hardtack."

Having crossed a large area of snow-covered France the squadron detrained on the night of January 2, 1918, at St. Maxient, a quaint little town in the Department of Deux Sevres, and was quartered in Canclaux Barracks, an ancient stone structure said to have been occupied by soldiers in medieval times. The building was entirely surrounded by vast stone walls, and beneath were dark dungeons and long winding passage-ways. Here the squadron was in quarantine for several days. For some time no tobacco could be obtained and provisions were scarce. The time was occupied in drill and instruction.

Leaving St. Maxient the outfit again entrained in box cars on the night of January 17, arriving at Romorantin, Department of Loir-et-Cher, on the afternoon of January 18, 1918, accompanied by the 75th Aero Construction Squadron and the 116th Aero Service Squadron. These were the first regular detachments of American soldiers to be stationed at Romorantin, and they were accorded a hearty welcome by the people of the town. The squadron was quartered for several weeks in barracks at Camp de Bluets, a French camp on the out-skirts of the town. Members of the 109 were at once detailed on construction work incidental to the development of Air Service Production Center No.2, and assisted in erecting the first American barracks in this camp, near the village of Pruniers, to which place the squadron was moved after spending a few weeks in the French camp.

A half dozen members of the squadron were detailed with the first regular force of American Military Police in Romorantin, and details from the organization began the construction of the American railroad through the camp. The morale and health of the troops during this period were good, regardless of the hard labor required of the men and weeks of cold rainy weather when the sun was rarely to be seen.

LT Ferson was detached for duty as post adjutant serving in that capacity, with Major Robert J. Bates, the first commander of the post. Lieut Darby was detailed to duty as post surgeon, and LT Wifvat was made post engineer supply officer. LT Ott and LT McVey left the post on February 15th for duty as flyers; and on February 20th, 2nd Lieut Emmett Gruner was attached to the squadron. The designation of the organization was changed from the 109 Aero Service Squadron to the 803rd Aero Repair Squadron.

On February 20, 1918, the squadron was assigned to duty with the Transportation Division, Air Service, and two days later moved from its quarters near Pruniers to the first barracks erected near the present location of the transportation shops and motor park. On the same date the squadron received its first pay in France.

The work of starting operations at the transportation park was immediately begun. Members of the squadron practically built the first repair shop on the field, end installed the machinery. Large quantities of motor equipment was beginning to arrive, and the men were put to the work of assembling this machinery. Automobile, trucks, trailers, etc., were continually arriving from the front and this equipment was salvaged and repaired. Members of the squadron were assigned to duty with the Railway and Marine Sub-division and assisted in the operation of the first trains run under supervision of the American over the narrow-gauge line between Romorantin and Pruniers.

1st LT C. O. Andersen assumed command of the squadron on March 22, 118, relieving 1stLT J. A. Herlihy, who was assigned to duty with the Transportation Division. During August 2nd LT Emmett Gruner left the squadron for assignment to duty at the front, and on September 19th 1st LT K. C. Gibbs was detached and assigned to duty at Paris. 1st LT Alfred R. McCay was assigned to the organization for a short time during September, 1918.

Perhaps the most dangerous and spectacular work performed by the organization during the Great War has been convoy duty. As soon as the squadron was assigned to the Transportation Division many of the men were detailed to this work. At one time or another practically every man in the organization has done duty as driver of some kind of motor vehicle. Squadron records show that on several occasions more than half the organization has been absent on convoy duty. This work consisted in convoying truck trains loaded with various kinds of material end equipment from the different base ports and interior supply depots of France to points along the entire line of the battle front from Belgium to the American sector in Alsace-Lorraine.

During the early Spring of 1918 a large detachment of 803rd men was sent to Paris. These men

were distributed between the camps at Orly Field, Versailles and the city of Paris. For several months many of these men were attached to the French Army as truck drivers, and in this capacity made frequent trips to the front and were often under fire. The entire detachment in and around Paris was constantly subject to the frequent Bosche air raids directed at the French capitol, and many of the men were in Paris when "Grand Bertha" the famous long-range gun was using the Eiffel tower an aiming point.

Many of the men narrowly escaped death from shrapnel during aerial attacks in and around Paris; and on several occasions many of them witnessed the killing of many persons and the destruction of buildings and other property by the long-range gun.

In March and June, and again in July, 1918, when the great German drives threatened to smash the lines north of Paris members of the squadron did their bit in helping to stem the tide of the Hun invasion. Some were engaged in hauling troops, ammunition and supplies to the front; while others were held in readiness to assist in the evacuation of Paris should this become necessary. In this work many members of the squadron worked along the firing line, and were present at some of the biggest engagements on the Western Front.

When the Yanks halted the German's big drive in the memorable fight at Chateau Thierry, for many days and nights members of the 803rd assisted in moving troops and supplies to the front lines and in transporting wounded to the rear. On this and numerous other occasions they also helped the civilian population in escaping from the danger zones. Many thrilling experiences might be told by men serving on these missions.

During the Summer of 1918 members of the squadron who were not engaged in convoy work were kept busy in the shops and on the transportation field repairing and assembling automobiles. On many occasions the men worked day and night to fill rush orders from the front for equipment.

During October 1918 all members of the squadron, with the exception of 40 men, retained by the Transportation Division, were assigned to the aeroplane shops of the Production and Maintenance Division, at Air Service Production Center No.2. In these shops the men assisted in turning out "Liberty" planes, but on account of the signing of the Armistice, November 11, 1918, the entire personnel was again assigned to transportation.

Of the holidays celebrated in France by the squadron, November 11, 1918, the day on which the Armistice was signed by Germany and the Allies, is the most memorable. In celebration of the event November 12th was declared a holiday, and no soldier in France will ever forget that date. All work was suspended, except that absolutely necessary. Soldiers and civilians paraded past the camps and in the streets of the town of Remorantin, headed by American bands, and the flags of the Allies floated from every building.

July 4, 1918 was celebrated by the troops at Air Service Production Center No.2, in true American fashion; and on July 14, French Independence Day, French and American soldiers

observed the occasion in a fitting manner.

Since arrival in France approximately 50 per cent of the original personnel of the organization has been transferred to other commands; these vacancies being filled by replacement from other organizations.

During November the sum of 500 francs was raised in the squadron by popular subscription for the adoption of a French War Orphan. This sum will be used to support a little French girl for one year.

At present the 803rd Aero Repair Squadron is stationed at Air Service Production Center No. 2, the entire organization being assigned to the Transportation Division. The present strength of the squadron is as follows: One 1st Lieutenant, LT C. O. Andersen, Squadron Commander; Enlisted men, 144. The squadron is engaged in convoy duty and work in the transportation shops and on the motor park.

Although the 109 Aero Squadron served in France, it was not involved in combat during World War I. In order to perpetuate the history and traditions of this great Aero Squadron, which served as part of the American Expeditionary Forces, it was reconstituted as the 109 Observation Squadron, a unit of the National Guard of the State of MN with formal Federal recognition on 17 Jan 1921.

In the summer of 1920, three men met in a restaurant on Wabasha Street in downtown St. Paul to discuss a bold, new concept of military aviation. Their meeting was prompted by the Militia Bureau's Circular Number One issued on 1 Jun 1920, in which the War Department gave authorization to the Militia Bureau to include auxiliary units in the organization of National Guard Divisions. Three hours later, when the trio stood up and shook hands, the idea for the 109 Aero Squadron had been born. These men, the motivating force in the organization of this fledgling air unit concept, were LTC William C. Garis, the Assistant Adjutant General of the State of Minnesota; T. Glenn Harrison, a reporter for the St. Paul Daily News who later became the editor-in-chief of that paper; and LT Ray S. Miller, a recently discharged Army Air Service pilot who was then the chief pilot for the Curtiss Northwest Company based at Curtiss Field on the corner of Larpenteur and Snelling Avenues in St. Paul. Little did these three men realize that their actions that day would so thoroughly change the traditional role of the National Guard in the years to come.

Pursuing their objective with the optimism of youth and the parental blessing of the Minnesota Adjutant General, BG W. F. Rhinow, the three men unofficially formed the 109 Aero Squadron. At their first organizational meeting in Jul 1920.

Shortly after this first organizational meeting, plans were made to demonstrate the effectiveness of an air unit within the framework of the National Guard. General Rhinow was persuaded to rent a Curtiss Oriole biplane from Mr. William Kidder, the Director of the Curtiss Northwest Airplane Company. With this aircraft, they proposed to fly from St. Paul to Washing-

ton, DC, to meet with the Militia Bureau about the formation of an Air National Guard. At that time, it would have been easier to "sell" the idea of a new cavalry unit to Army officials in Washington, since the airplane was still regarded with skepticism in military circles. On October 2, they landed the Oriole at Bolling Field in Washington. As luck would have it, they soon crossed paths with BG William Mitchell, who was serving as assistant chief of the Air Service. "Trips through the air from such a distance as Saint Paul to Washington, D.C., were just not done," Miller recalled. "But we made it without incident and when we walked into the Militia Bureau office, all in uniform, there were some surprised expressions on their faces." Miller said General Mitchell asked him where he had gotten his wings. "I earned them at Love Field, sir," I replied, "that broke the ice and we told him all about our ideas." General Mitchell wanted to know by what authority the new air unit had been formed and who was in it. Miller admitted the 109 lacked federal recognition, but went on to explain that the unit's personnel included World War I pilots, mechanics and ground officers who were spending their own time and money in the aerial venture. After hearing this, General Mitchell pledged his support. The Minnesota delegation spent three days in Washington, making several official visits and enthusiastically selling their concept of an Air National Guard. The military leaders who listened expressed interest and pledged support for such an organization. As a result, the unit received federal recognition on January 17, 1921 as the 109 Observation Squadron. The 109 was the first Air National Guard unit to receive federal recognition following World War I.

The newly formed unit's first call to active duty came in January, 1921, when Governor Preus ordered an aerial search for Cook County Commissioner Maher who had ventured out onto Lake Superior in an open boat and was lost. The State once again rented a Curtiss Oriole and Major Ray Miller and Lieutenant Joe Westover made the flight to Port Arthur, Canada, to join the Canadian Mounted Police in the search for Commissioner Maher. Although the temperature was 40 degrees below zero, the undaunted pilots continued their search for the missing man. Unfortunately, the commissioner was never found and it was feared for a while that even the Air National Guard crew was lost due to engine trouble on their return trip. As it turned out, they landed on a frozen lake, succeeded in getting help and returned to safety after locating a trapper's cabin.

In the summer of 1921, the State of Minnesota rented a landing field near Fort Snelling which had previously been used as a race track and built three hangars at the cost of \$50,000. This was done because the War Department would not issue any equipment to the newly formed Air National Guard unit until the State had provided adequate facilities and hangars for the equipment. The landing field, called Speedway Field, occupied the site of the present Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

The Squadron's second call to active duty came in the fall of 1921 and commercial equipment was once again rented from Mr. William Kidder at the Curtiss Northwest Airplane Company. This time the Squadron's duties included forest fire patrol over the north woods of Minnesota during which time they rendered valuable assistance by spotting forest fires before they were out of control.

The Minnesota Observation Squadron was first designated as the 109 Observation Squadron on 21 Oct 1921. At this time, the official history of the 109 Squadron was passed on to the Minnesota Air National Guard.

To receive Army Air Service aircraft, the 109 would have to provide suitable hangar space. As a location, the state of Minnesota selected Speedway Field, site of the present International Airport. There the State built three new hangars which were completed in February 1922. The squadron moved from its temporary offices in the St. Paul Armory to receive nine new JN-6H in 1923. Soon after, the field was officially dedicated Wold-Chamberlain Field to honor two Minnesota Air Service pilots who lost their lives in the service of their country during the first World War. The 109 Observation Squadron's long sought Federal equipment finally arrived during Jan and Feb of 1922. It consisted of nine Curtiss JN6H and the necessary parts and equipment. This aircraft, a newer version of the World War I trainer called the "Jenny", was equipped with aerial cameras, radios and machine guns.

Along with this equipment came 1LT Clarence MacIver of the Army Air Service to act as the inspector and instructor for the squadron. He became the unit's first Air Force Advisor. The Squadron's maiden flight took place on 9 Apr 1922, when all nine of the unit's Curtiss JN6Hs took to the air from Speedway Field.

The 109 held its first summer camp at Speedway Field on 1 Jul 1922, in cooperation with the Army Guard units stationed both at Fort Snelling and Camp Lakeview, Lake City, MN. The pilots and enlisted men of the Squadron slept in tents at Speedway Field while their planes were housed in the newly built hangars. Flying time during this encampment consisted mostly of cross country formation flying, aerial observation, photographic work and liaison with the infantry and artillery units.

When major forest fires broke out in the north woods in August of 1922, the Governor asked the Adjutant General to call out some of the aircraft of the 109 Observation Squadron to locate fires before they reached major proportions. The unit spent 61 days on active duty and made excellent radio reports about the fire locations which, for a time, actually threatened some of the small northern towns. During this period the Squadron exemplified itself by flying over the burning timber areas although there would be no emergency landing fields in the event of engine failure.

During these years, while the Air Guard was forming itself as a possible new power in our nation's structure, the regular Army Air Service was trying to overcome extreme difficulty in the area of equipment, funds and recognition. The War Department, topheavy with infantry, artillery and cavalry thinkers, developed a grim distaste for the small group of veteran airmen led by Brigadier General William Mitchell who was seeking to advance the airplane as the prime power over the country's traditional military weapons.

The 109's first fatality occurred late in 1925 when Lt. Edward A. Michaud was killed in an aircraft accident.

18 Jan 1926, Lt. Russell Olson was killed when he crashed in his J-I standard training plane while on a flight from Wold-Chamberlain Field. went into a flat spin and he was unable to pull out. Pilot Is Killed, Observer hurt LT William R. Nolan

Another crash which occurred in Nov, claimed the life of Col Carl Eielson, a native of North Dakota. Governor Christensen of Minnesota offered to send an escort of the 109 with Eielson's body when he was returned to North Dakota for burial.

During this year, the 109 Observation Squadron held its summer camp at Wold-Chamberlain Field and dedicated the camp to Lt. Russell Olson, who was killed in a crash the year before. By this time, the 109 was getting used to its three new Curtis O-1 Falcon which had just replaced some of the unit's Jennies. A familiarization flight was made to Winnipeg in May. Much of the unit's "promotional" flying was curbed by the War Department's restriction of National Guard planes to airport dedications and other civic ceremonies unless those holding the celebration would pay all expenses and provide property damage and liability insurance for the aircraft.

The first issue of the service type aircraft, the Douglas 02C, had begun in 1927. Before it was complete throughout all nine units, certain defects were noted in the aircraft and the Chief of the Air Corps recommended that no additional airplanes of this type be procured for active flying.

On July 28, 1927, while the men were at their summer encampment, a tremendous windstorm blew in and raised much havoc. Some of the 30 tents that were blown down. The bottom picture demonstrates the oddity of some damage. The plane here just blew off its moorings and flew along until the propeller got stuck under a building.

On September 1, 1927, the War Department announced that all of the Jennies and standard trainers would be salvaged, regardless of condition or flying needs. The large number of crashes and fatalities caused by these wood and wire aircraft resulted in their retirement. Since this would leave many units with only a few aircraft, it was necessary for the National Guard to secure primary training planes which included Consolidated TW3's (Tail Wobblies) and PTL's.

In July. 1928. the unit once again held its summer camp at Wold-Chamberlain Field and was able to utilize its new aircraft to a great extent. They flew the Curtiss Falcon and the Douglas 0-2H airplanes, which were just then beginning to replace their Curtiss Falcons. Some Consolidated 0-17's were received from the Army and used for bombing practice.

The summer camp of 1929 was a barnstorming aerial circus that included such acts as wing walking, parachute jumping and acrobatics as well as air races around Speedway Field.

In addition, the first air to ground broadcast was made from the new Douglas 0-2H equipped with receivers and transmitters and was heard by all listeners in the area over KSTP radio.

In an attempt to update the role that the Guard would play in assisting with both minor and major emergencies, the Militia Bureau established new Standards for the Guard units and insisted on four Standard Observation planes and four training planes. They also insisted that there be an operations building and shops for parachute, radio, armament, photo, machine work and a motor pool at all bases in addition to the usual hangars.

By August of 1930, the unit received four of the newest Army Air Corps aircraft, the Douglas O-38's with 525 horsepower Hornet engines.

The highlight of the year for the 109 Squadron was its move from Wold-Chamberlain Field to the St. Paul Municipal Airport in July. The superior quality of the facilities such as runways and buildings precipitated this move. To commemorate this event, a dance was held in the new hangar and refreshments were served in the "near beer" bar in the building. The construction of Camp Ripley, the National Guard's new training base at Little Falls, Minnesota, also got underway in 1930 and the unit looked forward to training at these new facilities.

On May 10, 1931, the 109 Observation Squadron flew their six aircraft to Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio, to participate in the largest aerial exhibition ever held up to that time. For one whole week, planes from the United States Army Air Corps and National Guard units from 19 states streamed into Wright Field. By May 17th there were some 672 planes on hand for the exhibition. This was the first time that National Guard units had ever participated in Army Air Corps maneuvers, and for the next two weeks these aircraft concentrated on maneuvers and mass formations over cities on the Eastern seaboard.

The six Douglas Observation planes of the 109 were joined by the National Guard planes of the State of Washington on the first leg to Chicago. A V-type formation, as prescribed in War Department orders was flown by their aircraft and they were brought up in tight formation over LaCrosse, Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The aircraft landed in Chicago to take on fuel and proceeded to Dayton, Ohio, the next afternoon. With their 575 horsepower engines, the aircraft were capable of cruising at more than 120 miles per hour. Two of the 109 planes were equipped with two-way radio sets which made it possible to give and receive orders from the ground or in flight.

Upon arrival in Dayton, Major Ray S. Miller, was appointed commander of all the National Guard planes participating in the demonstration. He stated that, This is a first for the Guard. The pilots will learn what strict discipline means and will have to know their place in formation and keep it. They will learn how to function with a large organization and they will be impressed with a necessity of strict discipline and enforcement of orders. If a pilot should fail during these maneuvers, it may mean not only that he has failed to perform his duty but may mean accident or death to himself and his fellow pilots. This demonstration will afford the 109 a great opportunity since the Army Air Corps has never before invited National Guard units to participate in the maneuvers."

During the maneuvers, Chicago, New York, Boston, Atlantic City, Philadelphia and Washington

D.C. were favored with special demonstrations consisting of an attack in close, low altitude formation, pursuit tactics, bombardment formations, dog fights and individual pursuit combat demonstrations and combat aeronautics.

During these maneuvers, one ship detached itself from the fleet and dipped low as the great air armada swept over Van Wert, Ohio. A "bomb" was seen to drop from this airplane and it landed at the doorstep of a modest cottage. The "bomb" was in fact, a small sack containing a letter. Van Wert, a small town on direct air route from Chicago to Dayton, was the birthplace of Major Ray S. Miller who dropped the letter to his parents.

Upon completion of these maneuvers, the 109 Observation Squadron received a commendation for its performance from General Douglas MacArthur to the Minnesota Adjutant General's Office stating "The 109 took its place beside regular Army Squadrons in every way." The Squadron also won praise from Major General Benjamin D. Foulois, Air Corps Commander, who was responsible for the efficiency of the entire demonstration. Major Ray S. Miller was personally commended for his excellent performance as Commander of the 54 National Guard planes present during the maneuvers.

War was declared by the 109 Observation Squadron on all imaginary foes when it began its fifteen day annual summer encampment at Camp Ripley in Little Falls, Minnesota in 1932. The 23 officers and 95 enlisted men were in for two weeks of the most extensive training scheduled for the Squadron since its organization.

It was the first time that an encampment was held outside the Twin Cities. Working with the 151st and 125th Artillery Brigades on artillery fire direction, the men of the 109 assumed wartime conditions and discipline. Training included drill in artillery adjustments, target practice, intensive formation flying and other forms of aerial activities. This encampment was one of the most successful and productive tours of active duty accomplished by the Squadron up until that time. It was the first time the Squadron was able to carry out a complete program of military maneuvers under actual field conditions. They operated with mobile ground equipment engaging in aerial gunnery with both fixed and flexible armament, aerial combat with camera guns, bombing, artillery direction both by visual signal and radio, aerial photography and map making, formation maneuvers and radio direction maneuvers.

The 109 returned to Camp Ripley again in 1933 for annual field training, a practice they continued until 1953 with the exception of the 1940-45 and 1951-53 call-ups.

At this camp they emphasized aerial photography and bombing practice. The mood was serious and the workday full, just as if they knew that their training would pay off on their tactical missions during World War II.

Another important event that occurred during the 1933 encampment was a meeting of the Adjutant Generals from several states. They were flown to Camp Ripley by the 109 Squadron to form a protest against the Federal government's decision to slash National Guard

appropriations. Unfortunately, the depression was hard upon the nation, and these budget cuts were a part of the government's belt tightening attitude.

By 1934, the airplane had become a very real thing and many smaller Minnesota towns such as Austin, Rochester, Alexandria, Bemidji and Wilmar, were building their own airports with the help of the WPA and CWA. The regulation of aircraft at this time, was minimal and only 100 of the states 310 airplanes had identification.

When the 109 went to summer camp in 1935, the unit boasted 97 enlisted men and 22 officers. They had planes that flew at 240 miles per hour and the encampment training consisted of aerial gunnery, formation flying, navigation and aerial photography. A highlight of the encampment was the arrival of Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, who brought his wife back for a look at his home town of Little Falls which was only a short distance from Camp Ripley. In 1938, the unit received a new observation plane, the O-47A. It was powered by a 975 horsepower Cyclone engine, had a top speed of 251 miles per hour and a cruising speed of 200 miles per hour. The crew consisted of a radio operator, machine gunner and pilot.

During this year, the 109 Observation Squadron assisted in tracing forest fires in Northern Minnesota. A. J. Lund, a Pioneer Press-Dispatch photographer accompanied Major Miller on an aerial survey of these fires and reported. "A curtain of smoke hides Canada, what it conceals we are unable to tell. But in Minnesota, the fires appear to be under control. Although charred trunks are still smoldering in the burned out region, the first smoke we spotted was a smudge Northeast of Eveleth where a strip about one mile long and a half mile wide had been burned. Just North of Hibbing, another small area which was mostly peat, was sending up smoke. From Hibbing, we flew over an almost uninhabited wilderness toward International Falls. Fire had not touched this tract, but if it should. I don't believe there would be any stopping it."

When the King and Queen of England made a Royal Visit to Canada, seven of the 109's planes flew there to honor the Royal Party. As the King stepped from his train, the planes flew overhead and dipped their wings in salute.

In 1940, the 109 participated in maneuvers with the 4th Army at Camp Ripley. The 109 was defending Camp Ripley with the Red Army and bombed the Blue Army Headquarters as part of their maneuvers. At this encampment, the airplanes of the 109 were subject, for the first time, to the guns of the 206th Coast Artillery Detachment, which was known to have one of the highest fire accuracy ratings in the United States.

Later in the encampment, fourteen Army pursuit planes under the command of Major Harold flew into Camp Ripley from Barksdale Field in Freeport, Louisiana. The planes were the P-22, which had cruising speeds from 225 to 250 miles per hour.

During 1940, the 109 experimented with an observation aircraft, an O-38-E, which was equipped with floats to land on the Mississippi River that was adjacent to the St. Paul Airport at that time. In December of that year, construction of the \$290,000 addition to the unit's hangar

at Holman Municipal Airport was also begun.

The year 1941 was less than one month old when the 109 Observation Squadron received its first call to serve the federal government. The authority for induction into federal service read, In conformity with instructions contained in Presidential Executive Order No. 8633, dated 14 January 1941, all federally recognized elements of the National Guard of the United States and the State of Minnesota, will, effective 10 February 1941, be ordered into active military service of the United States." So, to the strains of "I'll Be Back In A Year, Little Darlin' ", the 109 left St. Paul's Holman Field on February 24, 1941, for Beauregard Landing Field (renamed Esler Field in April), near Alexandria, Louisiana, where they were to undergo extended training for one year in preparation for national defense.

The unit was moved to Fontainebleau, Mississippi on July 1, then to Biloxi a week later. Participating in the Louisiana maneuvers, the 109 found itself moving to Beaumont, Texas, then to Lafayette and Oakdale, Louisiana, seldom more than two weeks in one location. This mobility training, highly vexing at the moment, was to be of great value later.

On 7 October 1941, the 109 returned to Esler Field, La., to join the 67th Observation Group which had been activated 1 September 1941. The 109 and the 107th Observation Squadron from Michigan comprised the 67th Group. Lt. Col. Oliver H. Stout was Group Commander.

About this time the newly formed Air Transport Command needed pilots. As most of the 109 pilots in 1941 were Northwest Airlines pilots, it was a natural consequence that several would be tapped to go in that direction. Similarly, airline pilots were declared "essential" vocations, and a further drain on the military pilot staff ensued as more Northwest pilots returned to their critical civilian occupation, much to the dismay of Major Ray S. Miller, Squadron Commander.

On 2 November, 1941, Major Ray S. Miller, who had served as Commanding Officer of the 109 since 1 February 1921, was transferred to Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. Captain Gilman C. Holien then assumed command. Captain Holien had enlisted in the 109 as a private, advancing through the ranks to become Commanding Officer.

Also on 2 November 1941, the 109 departed Ester Field enroute to the east coast to participate in the Carolina maneuvers. Arriving 6 November 1941, temporary station was established at Knollwood Airport, Knollwood, North Carolina. Then on 1 December 1941, the unit returned to the home station, Ester Field, Louisiana. After the Declaration of War, 8 December 1941, Observation Units of the 3rd Air Support Command were ordered to various temporary stations for the purpose of performing close-to-shore reconnaissance missions. The first such assignment was to Savannah Army Air Base, the unit arriving there on 18 December 1941. Some O-47s were used and operations consisted of aerial patrol of vital coastal areas and shipping lanes in search of enemy surface or submarine craft.

On 1 February 1942, the Commanding Officer, Captain Gilman C. Holien, was promoted to Major. War having been declared only a few months previous, Major Holien had planned a

program of intensive training to prepare his squadron for its part in the conflict. Unfortunately Major Holien had been left in a weakened condition by several weeks of illness from a skin infection and died on 12 July 1942. For a short time, Captain Arden Cowgill assumed command. Then 1st Lt. Albert R. DeFehr who joined the 109 Observation Squadron on 11 June 1941, took over as Commander. His assigned duties had been assistant operations officer and operations officer respectively. A month after taking command, Lieutenant DeFehr was promoted to Captain.

New and experienced pilots were being assigned to the 109 to replace the ones transferred due to reorganization.

Mid-August of 1942, ground echelons of all squadrons of the 67th Observation Group (109, 153rd, 107th, and 12th Observation Squadrons) were ordered to the staging area, Fort Dix, New Jersey.

At the Port of Embarkation replacements and reassigned personnel brought the Table of Organization up to full strength. All troops were thoroughly processed for overseas shipment, including immunizations, issuing of identification cards, identification tags, and all items of equipment required by the Table of Basic Allowances.

On August 31, 1942, the ground echelon boarded the troopship Queen Elizabeth for the week-long trip to England. They were joined a month later by the air echelon at Membury R.A.F. Base the first of several locations occupied by the unit in the United Kingdom.

After preliminary sector reconnaissance in Tiger Moths, training at Membury began in British Spitfires. At this time there was no certainty as to the need or function of the group. Plans and training dealt with becoming accustomed to flying and navigation in England. Periodically, the unit changed aircraft changed mission, personnel, and location. Once established, the 109 Squadron made a creditable record for itself under combat conditions.

On 21 November 1942, the 109 Observation Squadron was dispersed, and the pilots were assigned to the group. The ground crews and other enlisted personnel were moved, along with the squadron staff officers, to Atcham, Shropshire. There they served as a Maintenance and Operational Training Unit. The work was done so well that it won a commendation from General Eaker.

While stationed at Atcham Airdrome near Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England, the 109 acted as a combat crew replacement center, (C.C.R.C.). The squadron had 76 Mark V Spitfires and several other types of R.A.F. aircraft. Each crew chief was assigned three or more aircraft.

Pilots fresh out of stateside flying schools were assigned to the 109 for time in the Spits for operational training, formation flying, tactics etc., from older instructor pilots and then sent to fighting units.

Also while at Atcham the 109 was involved in "Operation Prairie Fire" and "The Torch Movement". This entailed quite an operation. P-39's were unloaded from ocean going vessels at Liverpool and sent to nearby Burtonwood Airdrome where subassemblies were attached and the planes then flown to Atcham. The 109 personnel pulled acceptance checks and performed all the safety checks. An external fuel tank was installed at this time and the 37 mm. cannon and machine guns were bore sighted and test fired.

New pilots were assigned these aircraft and flee, fuel consumption tests and armament checks. They became as thoroughly familiar with their own aircraft as 10 hours of flying time could make them. After their approximate 10 hours they were sent to Africa in groups of 25 to 30 with a B-25 "Mother Ship" escorting and navigating. Once there, they were used mainly as air-to-ground anti-tank weapons against Romme's forces.

On May 15th, the 109 Observation Squadron was reconvened at Membury. When the pilots had been reassigned everything returned to where it had been the previous November. Permission had been granted to send a few pilots at a time to different RAF Squadrons for a tour of four to six weeks operational duty. 109 pilots flew with various squadrons of the RAF and RCAF, and greatly benefited by their experiences. Flying Mark V Spitfires some of which dated back almost to the Battle of Britain the tactics of observation and reconnaissance were practiced.

On 5 July, 1943, by official order from 8th Air Support Command, the word "Observation" was dropped from the Squadron's designation, and the new and complete title "109 Reconnaissance Squadron (Fighter)" was adopted.

With the coming of November, the squadron was again broken up. The pilots and ground officers were transferred to other squadrons in the group. Major DeFehr, commander of the squadron left to hold an important assignment in a new fighter wing being formed. He took with him many of the key personnel of the organization. New personnel were transferred into various sections, bringing the squadron up to full strength again.

On Sunday 12 December 1943, the squadron left Membury by convoy in a semi-tactical move for Middle Wallop, Hampshire, where a new station was established. It was not long before typical Yank humor nicknamed the base "Center Punch".

On 28 December 1943, the designation of the squadron was again changed this time to the 109 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

Reconnaissance technique dictated that the leader (equipped with cameras) would duck and run if they were jumped by German fighters. The "Wingman" was left to engage the enemy. Naturally the Luftwaffe was aware of this, and tried to concentrate their attention on the lead ship.

Lack of flying activity during the poor winter weather provided an excellent opportunity to

develop an innovation in aerial photography for fighter aircraft. Up to that time the cameras on the squadron's Spitfires were mounted in the aircraft to take oblique photos. The ingenuity of Sgts. Marusic, Carmody, Corbett and Christofferson produced a new camera mount which could take photographs vertically rather than oblique. The new mount was designed, built, installed, and first used by the men of the 109. The pilot could now fly directly over the target with much less exposure and hazard. Group Commander Peck congratulated the men on their ingenuity, and recommended them for the award of the Bronze Star Medal.

Lack of operational activity also provided the opportunity for increased training activity. All phases of tactical reconnaissance were studied. Training in the recognition of armored fighting vehicles and aircraft was also brought to a high degree of perfection.

In March, 1944, the "Ski Slides" in Northwestern France received considerable attention. These rocket-launching platforms and control buildings were used to launch pilotless aircraft against England. The 109 photographed the sites to make target maps. The Ninth Air Force medium bombers attacked each site until our damage-assessment photos showed that the site was no longer a threat. The "Ski Slides" were an important part of Hitler's secret weapon for beating England to her knees.

A commendation from General Samuel Anderson of the Ninth Bomber Command carried a warm and sincere note of appreciation for the efforts of personnel involved in securing invaluable meteorological data. These missions required deep penetration into enemy territory at many different altitudes. If they found the weather was too bad they alerted bomber group leaders who then could select a secondary target or abort the mission before they had penetrated too deeply.

A note of sorrow was added during March when it was learned that Major Al DeFehr, Commanding Officer of the squadron from February, 1942, until he was transferred to the 100th Fighter Wing in December, 1943, had been killed while adjusting artillery fire in Italy.

Flying activities in April and May of 1944 concentrated attention on the invasion coast, the highway network beyond the coast, rail marshalling yards and other logistical items.

The 109 squadron worked around the clock furnishing the necessary aerial intelligence information. The weather over the continent obligingly cooperated and a record 278 sorties were flown in May. The unit received a well-earned commendation from Ninth Air Force General Brereton and from Air Chief Marshal T. Leigh-Mallory.

The tempo of flying activity increased as the 109 entered June of 1944. The unit, like most in the Allies forces, was on alert around the clock. On June 5th white "invasion stripes" were painted around each wing, providing an immediate identification against the olive drab. Similarly all vehicles, tanks, etc. were marked. Bombers, fighters and reconnaissance continued their relentless destruction the enemy's defenses had been breached and the pace could not be relaxed. As soon as the Allied foothold on the continent was large enough to permit it, airstrips

were installed ... and the 109 crossed the English Channel to LeMele, France on July 2nd.

Now the reconnaissance mission included artillery fire control, assisting the ground forces in effective employment of firepower and mobility. Staying close behind the advancing forces, the 109 moved from LeMele to Buc, an airstrip twelve miles from Paris. From there, on August 14th, the 109 flew its 1000th mission of the war. Significantly, Major Hal Connor, CO of the 109, led this mission just as he had the first mission the squadron flew in December of 1943.

The location of this airstrip did not last long enough situated not far from Paris and Versailles, it afforded the men an excellent opportunity to visit many historical landmarks and famous buildings.

The 109 after hardly a month at Buc moved on to Gosselies, Belgium. All of these base relocations on the continent were performed without the cancellation of a mission.

Germany expended her last reserves of manpower and equipment in the vicious Battle of the Bulge, and lost the gamble and the war.

People newly assigned to the 109 as replacements were cajoled and jealously guarded by the veteran he was scheduled to replace. The entire policy of rotation was viewed with incredulity by the rest of the allied forces, most of whom had been engaged in hostile action since 1939. Many of the "charter members" of the squadron left for the States at this time.

In recognition of its continuing contributions to the Allied effort, the squadron was awarded a Unit Citation. Its aircrews amassed a total of 53 Air Medals (with 295 Bronze Clusters and 43 Silver Clusters), 13 Distinguished Flying Crosses and one Silver Star. Some medals were awarded posthumously. Ten of the aircraft maintenance men received Bronze Star Medals for outstanding performance.

The unit moved to Limburg and later to Eschwege Air Field in Germany in the spring of the year, the latter being the final location of the 109 before being disbanded in July 1945. Troop ships carried squadron members home in late summer and early fall.

A period of inactivity resulted for the 109 as the unit was "defederalized" in November 1945. Few of the original personnel remained to return with the unit.

During Aug 1946, enlistments were taken and officer candidates interviewed. On 14 Sep 1946, under the command of LTC Francis T. J. Carlson, the 109 was again extended federal recognition with a new designation 109 Fighter Squadron. Instead of cameras, the P-51's were equipped with six .50 caliber machine guns.

The first field training in 1946 at Camp Ripley was a leisurely reorientation for many returned members of the unit and an initiation for the war trained new members. By the summer of 1947, the war training paid off with a fully active two weeks of gunnery and other missions

flown off the sod airfield at Camp Ripley.

On 17 September 1948, a bright and windy day, a group of thirteen officers and thirty-seven airmen, mostly World War II veterans, mustered on the apron at Duluth Municipal Airport and heard Major General Ellard A. Walsh, the Adjutant General of Minnesota, read Special Order Number 144 ordering the activation of the 179th Fighter Squadron and supporting units.

Appointed as acting commander of the newly formed unit was Captain Earl W. Johnson. Selection of experienced personnel for a technician force was delegated to Captain John R. Hed, who was the first full-time technician officer and supervisor. Weekly drill sessions were held in Duluth's National Guard Armory and in October 1948, the first aircraft, a T-6 arrived. Due to lack of facilities in Duluth, six maintenance technicians commuted to Holman Field, St. Paul, Minnesota to maintain incoming aircraft.

The first fighter aircraft, the F-51D was assigned on December 12, 1948.

In January of 1949, the technician staff was increased in size and it became standard procedure for line personnel to take turns commuting to Holman Field every other week through the month of April. Operational flying in Duluth began in April although limited because of weather and facilities. Many of the checkout flights were conducted at Holman Field.

Administrative offices were in the National Guard Armory, approximately eight miles from the flight line. The operations and flight line buildings at the airport consisted of two hastily reconstructed, well used "WPA" shacks. A mobile machine shop was shared by a machinist, aircraft electrician and sheet metal man. The large packing crate cover for the mobile shop was turned on its side and used as a welding shop and storage area. Supply and armament storage was housed in an abandoned root cellar. Transportation and armament maintenance were housed above the root cellar in buildings that had seen better days.

The flight line consisted of aircraft parked on the taxi strip south of the present Municipal Airport hangar.

1949 provided a new and exciting experience for the members of the Minnesota Air National Guard. The St. Paul based units traveled to Camp Williams (now Volk Field), Wisconsin, for summer field training. The new location afforded better operational facilities for the units' flying missions and training, and was to be the site of future field training periods (with a few interruptions) for nearly a decade. Fighter tactics air-to-air and air-to-ground gunnery were to be the primary training objectives.

It was during the 1949 encampment that the 109 was joined by sister organizations from the upper Midwest: the 179th Fighter Squadron from Duluth, the 178th Fighter Squadron from Fargo and the 175th Fighter Squadron from Sioux Falls. began an era of friendly rivalry among these various squadrons which extended from precision flying missions to championship softball contests during field training at Camp Williams.

In March, 1950, Colonel Miller was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and named Chief of Staff of the Air Guard section, supervising all activities of the Minnesota Air National Guard.

Meanwhile, the 109 Fighter Squadron's fleet of F-51's that proved invaluable during the Second World War, were approaching obsolescence in the Air Force concept. Jet fighters were in short supply, and few Air National Guard organizations could be counted that were fortunate enough to feature these newer planes. Serviceable aircraft (even piston type) must have been urgently needed, for the Air Force suddenly tapped the 109 for twelve of the unit's F-51's for Korean.. Similarly, the 175th and 178th Fighter Squadrons in Sioux Falls and Fargo, respectively, yielded fighter aircraft to the Air Force for the emergency. All aircraft were quickly readied for transfer and ferried to the West Coast in August 1950, for trans-shipment to Korea. By the end of the year, most of the aircraft had been replaced in the squadrons, restoring the units to an acceptable level of operational capability. Routine activities began to develop a sense of urgency as international tensions increased. Field training sharpened up the skills of both air and ground units. Whatever the call, the 109 was ready.

Eventually, all ANG squadrons that had been flying F-51Ds had to surrender them back to the USAF in one form or another. For some squadrons this action was only a "paper" transfer, for the squadron itself might have been activated into Federal Service during the Korean War and they took their aircraft with them for the duration. Ninety-five ANG F-51Ds were recalled in July 1950 for shipment to Korea, which depleted several squadron inventories.

Utilizing the facilities of the 179th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Duluth, the 109, 175th and 179th Fighter Interceptor Squadrons engaged in concentrated air-to-air gunnery training over Lake Superior. During this time, each of these squadrons kept two F51D's on five minute alert and two more on fifteen minute alert. It seemed that one of the primary reasons for these alerts was to intercept North Central Airlines' flights that persisted in taking off from Brainerd, Minnesota, without a flight plan.

April, a record breaking flood from the Mississippi River engulfed Holman Field. Aircraft and equipment had to be evacuated to Wold-Chamberlain Field until the river subsided. Then in July, a tornado touched down at Wold-Chamberlain Field during the night. The next morning, Air Guard strength had fallen from two squadrons to only two flyable aircraft. Part of this wreckage, unfortunately, included a squadron of F-51D's from a Colorado Air Guard unit that had landed the previous afternoon and decided to remain overnight. The destruction wrought by the tornado created a tremendous workload of unexpected proportions for our aircraft maintenance and installation personnel. During the next few months replacement aircraft were flown in from all over the United States to bring the unit's strength back to normal.

On June 1, 1951, the formation of the Central Air Defense Force within the 31st Air Division absorbed many of the unit's Wing and Group personnel. During this time, the Fighter Interceptor Squadrons began making their operational reports directly to the 31st Air Division.

Shortly thereafter, the 109 received its first F-51H. It was an almost entirely different aircraft than the F-51D and the start of ground school for the aircraft led the unit to believe that a different type of fighter would be assigned. ***The unit had one F-51H attached from December 1952 through May 1953, which was used for maintenance instruction. 109 FIS F-51H 44-64335 at Minneapolis St. Paul.*** The F-51H, was later transferred to the Georgia ANG and the 109 was resupplied with F-51D's. At this time the 178th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Fargo, North Dakota, was reassigned to the 133d Wing bringing the Wing's strength back to four squadrons. Col. Dolny continued in command of the Wing. The Minnesota Air National Guard units rolled up their collective sleeves and started the job of rebuilding unit strength once again.

The T-33A, arrived in May, 1952, giving a false hope that the 109 was really going to get jet fighters. But the jet fighters never came. After twenty-one months of active duty, the Minnesota Air National Guard units reverted to state status on December 1, 1952. The aircraft remained on active duty while the Twin Cities units moved back to Holman Field. The 179th reverted to state control at the Duluth Air Base. Both units marked the termination of federal service with appropriate ceremonies. Lt. Col. Jerome returned from the Orient to assume command of the 179th. Later that year, three T-33A aircraft were finally assigned to the 109 to keep the pilots jet qualified. Maintenance was accomplished at Holman Field but most of the operational flying was done from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. By now, a few radar observers were beginning to knock on the door in anticipation of the arrival of all-weather interceptors. They must have been right, for a TB-25K, was assigned to train radar observers pending the arrival of all weather interceptors.

The following year, in June, 1954, the unit held its two weeks field training at Volk Field. While the 109 was still equipped with F-51D's, the 179th at Duluth had received the Lockheed F-94A and B, an all weather jet interceptor.

The unit's field training site in 1955 was Casper, Wyoming, and was dubbed the "Last Mustang Roundup" by members of the 109. The Wing's other three squadrons were all equipped with F-94A's and B's by this time and the 109 was the only squadron left with the F-51D.

There were no more F-51 in the air over Minnesota. The Air National Guard at Holman Airport said farewell to the last of the Mustangs just before the plane was taken into the air for its final one-way trip to the Air Force depot at McClellan Field, Sacramento, California. The F-51 from Minnesota was the last to be ferried from any point in the nation to the scrapping destination in California. The departure of the plane left the National Guard squadron with only trainer aircraft, including T-28A's, T-33A's, a VC-47A and a TB25K which served as a stop-gap measure to give local crews flying time.

The Guard unit also had permission to fly two of its assigned jet aircraft at Wold-Chamberlain Field during the interim while a military jet base was being developed in the area.

Finally, in the summer of 1957, the 109 got their jets. The 179th Fighter Interceptor Squadron

was assigned a new aircraft to replace its F-94A's and B's and the 109 latched on to them before they could get out of the state even though they could not fly them operationally out of Holman Field. Consequently, most of the summer was spent ferrying them back and forth to Volk Field and any other place where they could park them for training flights. The maintenance was still performed at Holman Field and, while the 109 was still in business, there were many unanswered questions about the future of the unit.

If anyone believed in Santa Claus, it must have been the members of the 109 Fighter Squadron. The Air Force Squadron at Minneapolis, which was equipped with the Northrup F-89H Scorpion, was being deactivated. The 109 was given the opportunity of taking over the entire facility, including the aircraft, during Christmas of 1957. The F-89H was armed with guided missiles and rockets. Included in the aircraft inventory were the last ten F-89's built by Northrup. It was a real challenge and one eagerly accepted by every member of the unit.

On January 1, 1959, the 109 started to stand runway alert. It was the first time since 1952 and exactly one year after getting the F-89H's. Extensive planning was also begun for the air-to-air firing of the guided missiles used for armament on the aircraft. Arrangements were made through the senior Air Advisor, Colonel (now Brigadier General) Clayton M. Isaacson, to use the facilities at Hurlburt Field in Florida to fire the unit's Falcon missiles over the Gulf of Mexico. So in March 1959, the 109 chalked up another first when they became the first Air National Guard Squadron to fire air-to-air guided missiles. Their score of 17 hits out of 20 missile firings was considered a remarkable achievement by both the Air Force and the Hughes Aircraft Co., the manufacturer of the missile.

The 179th in Duluth was notified in May that their F- 94's would soon be replaced by F-89J's. On July 9, 1959, the first "Scorpion" arrived on the Duluth ramp. Now all Minnesota units had a nuclear capability.

In the summer of 1959, the 179th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Duluth, converted to F-89J's and became capable of carrying rockets with nuclear warheads. The Twin Cities' unit went to Alpena, Michigan, for field training in August and fired rockets as part of their exercise. The 179th, busy with transitional flying remained at Duluth, but were able to send a contingent to Alpena for one evening to play softball. It seems that no one in the Twin Cities remembers if they won or lost that particular game.

The 109, under the command of Lt. Colonel Marvin Thorson, switched from the role of a fighter-bomber squadron to that of a fighter interceptor squadron upon receipt of the F-94s and also entered the jet era after having been forced to fly the inglorious T-28A for several months after some policy maker in the Air Force decided that it was more educational for a fighter pilot to fly a Trojan, than a Mustang. At least they were not alone, as three other Mustangs squadrons were forced into the same indignity while their F-51s went to the scrap heap.

The 109 FIS had a real hassle with their "hand-me-down" F-94s. Because of airfield limitations at their home base of Holman Field (St. Paul's Downtown Airport), all operational missions had to be conducted from Volk Field, WI or other bases. This meant they had to conduct maintenance at Holman, and then shuttle the aircraft to and fro, which was hardly conducive for adequate training. Their short-lived experience with the F-94 ended when the 432nd Fighter interceptor Squadron was deactivated at Wold Chamberlain Airport, Minneapolis, on January 2, 1958 and the 109 FIS took over, "lock, stock and barrel" their holdings and their F-89Hs.

The first week of 1960 came as a shock to some of the 109 pilots who had been flying fighters for the past fifteen or twenty years. The 109 was assigned four-engined transports, the Boeing C-97A. In January three aircrews and many maintenance personnel were sent to Travis Air Force Base, California, for a period of nine weeks of training. They were to then return to the home station and serve as a nucleus for training the rest of the unit.

All of 1960 was devoted to training aircrews. The change from a local area type mission to that of a world-wide mission called for a drastic adjustment in the psychology of handling pilots, many of whom had been "aircraft commanders" all of their military career.

The 109 Air Transport Squadron kept on the move during those first few months after deactivation. They had made seven interior flights consisting of two to Las Vegas, and one each to Miami, Birmingham, Denver, Scott AFB and McGuire AFB during which they hauled mostly aircraft engines. During November they also made flights to Torrejon AB, Madrid, Spain; Rhein Main AB, Frankfurt, Germany; Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico and Hickam AFB, Honolulu, Hawaii.

During April of 1964, Minnesota's 109 Air Transport Squadron was one of three Air Guard units that provided airlift support for the operation, "Carpet of Friendship." Through the program, some 120,000 pounds of clothing for earthquake torn San Jorge, a tiny island in the Azores off the coast of Portugal, was airlifted by MATS and ANG aircraft from Minnesota, Pennsylvania and New Hampshire.

There were 25 Air National Guard aircraft from units in Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Missouri and Wyoming that participated in the airlift. The 1,250 members of the 47th Division of the Minnesota Army National Guard were transported to Fort Richardson, Alaska, for 15 days of cold-weather training. Two weeks later the process was repeated in reverse and the Army Guardsmen arrived home safe and sound after their two-week Alaskan adventure. All of the Guard units participating in the airlift received invaluable experience and training in large scale troop and cargo movement. All flights and the coordination between the units went very smoothly. Of the 94 flights completed, only one plane had to make a precautionary stop enroute and was immediately replaced by a backup aircraft which completed the remainder of the flight without incident.

Two additional airlifts were conducted by the 133d in 1964. In July, a C-97 loaded with medical supplies, food and other goods contributed by the people of New Ulm, Minnesota, was flown to Tolionon, Guatemala, as part of the "People to People" program proposed by the late President

John F. Kennedy. Air Guard planes are only given permission to make these flights when a country appeals directly to the U.S. State Department with a specific request for goods.

In February 1964, 125 officers and airmen of the 133d Air Transport Wing (H), the 133d Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron and the 109 Aeromedical Flight participated in a 5 day field training exercise at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. From an overall evaluation of the Hickam field training, it was obvious that all Guardsmen gained a great amount of experience and knowledge. During this short period of training, they were able to grasp the new policies and became aware of current Air Force and MATS procedures.

"Operation Warmth" landed in Korea early in December 1964 when a Minnesota ANG C-97 delivered 3,000 blankets donated by citizens of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area. About 50 children from orphanages who received the blankets were on hand to greet the aircraft. They sang Christmas carols to members of the crew before the blankets were presented. The blankets were then distributed by chaplains of the 7th Infantry Division.

In June, the 133d was called upon to provide air transportation for 507 Minnesota Army Guardsmen of the 47th Viking Division who were headed for a summer field training exercise in Alaska. Assisting in the airlift were five C-97's from the 133d ATG, Mpls-St. Paul, four C-97's from the 157th ATG at Manchester, and two C-121's from the 170th ATG at Newark, all units of the 133d Air Transport Wing.

The 133d closed out the year 1965 with "Operation Christmas Star" when it flew Christmas gifts to our troops in Southeast Asia. Air Guard aircraft were used to transport the gifts because planes of the regular Air Force were being used to transport troops and materiel.

Effective 1 January 1966, the Military Air Transport Service changed its title to Military Airlift Command (MAC). The title, EASTAF, was also changed as of 8 January to 21st Air Force. Additional changes within the unit were made in February when Lt. Col. Marvin A. Thorson was named 133d Group Commander. He replaced Colonel Alfred C. Schwab, Jr., who joined the State Staff as Chief of Staff for Air.

Due to the highly successful field training exercises held at Gulfport during the previous two years, it was again selected as the site for the 1966 annual field training exercise. Six days of field training were completed at Gulfport and the remainder of the required 15 days was performed at home station under the "Texas Plan."

During 1967 the 133d continued its airlift support to Southeast Asia. By May of 1967 the 109 Military Airlift Squadron had flown well over 30 overseas cargo missions that year, eight of which were flown to Vietnam in direct support of the war effort. Other destinations included Frankfurt, Tokyo, Goose Bay, Australia, Colombia and Madrid.

USAF Unit Histories

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